BONNEY, DUANA, MA "Lolita the Immortal: Nabokov, Kubrick, and Lyne's Nymphet." (2009)
Directed by Keith Cushman. 39 pp.

"Lolita the Immortal: Nabokov, Kubrick, and Lyne's Nymphet" is an analysis of Vladimir Nabokov's controversial novel, Stanley Kubrick and Adrian Lyne's films, and at times a look at the screenplay of each film. The purpose is to compare and contrast each film with the novel, examining what each film offers the audience, and how well the films adhere to the novel.

BONNEY, DUANA, MA “Luray’s Pearls: A Woman’s Life, Struggle, and Wisdom in North Carolina, 1921-2008.” (2009)
Directed by Keith Cushman. 28 pp.

“Luray’s Pearls: A Woman’s Life, Struggle, and Wisdom in North Carolina, 1921-2008" is a biographical essay using feminist rhetoric in a segmented essay style. The use of narrative presents a more intimate picture of the subject and aims to involve the reader. I obtained information about the subject through personal interviews and research into the Great Depression and women, and education in North Carolina.

LOLITA THE IMMORTAL: NABOKOV, KUBRICK, AND LYNE'S NYMPHET

AND

LURAY'S PEARLS: A WOMAN'S LIFE, STRUGGLE AND WISDOM IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1921-2008

by

Duana Bonney

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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Master of Arts

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Approved by

Committee Chair

To my parents: Your faith and patience made this possible.

For my grandparents: Life is hard without you, but endurable because of you. I miss you.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

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Date of Acceptance by Committee

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Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta.

- HH in Lolita

The first three sentences of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* quickly ensnare its audience. Such a taboo subject made it challenging for the novel to find an audience in 1955 and even more difficult to find a theater to call home in 1962 and 1997 when its two movie versions were produced. Nabokov's novel is the confession of an aging European professor, Humbert Humbert. He seduces and is seduced by twelve year old Dolores Haze, whom he dubs Lolita. He tells his story in an elegantly confessional style, which critic Barbara Wyllie writes, is "the noir hero's only salvation" (153). And salvation is what Humbert is striving for, as well as redemption and immortality. Humbert's style has been compared to Jean Jacques Rousseau's as Humbert is "no worse than the classical autobiographer" (129).

Readers must question whether or not Humbert's confession is accurate or a distorted remembrance of a fantasy gone awry. Nonetheless, he presents himself as both criminal and victim, making it difficult for readers to loathe him completely. It took

Nabokov well over a year to find a publisher for what he considered his "highly immoral affair." It took Hollywood seven years to create the first of two *Lolita* movies. My goal is to examine Nabokov's novel, and compare and contrast directors Stanley Kubrick and Adrian Lyne's *Lolita* films, at times quoting from the screenplays. I wish to look at the novel in depth, as well as various scenes from both films, examining the tension and conflicts that build from scene to scene, and encounter to encounter, as each film offers its own version of Nabokov's story. I will explore how Lyne's film is more in line with and a better representation of Nabokov's heavily packed, atmospheric novel.

While American publishing houses refused to publish Nabokov's *Lolita*, the novel was published in September 1955 in France by Olympic Press, a house that frequently published erotica. Even with the novel's harsh reviews and backlash, author Graham Greene called it one of the best books of the year. For his support, Nabokov sent Greene an autographed first edition of the novel. *Lolita* was eventually published in America in 1958, and the novel vaulted to the best sellers' list. Many of the novel's subsequent tribulations, but also popularity, came from the material itself, which was considered obscene and immoral. Reviewer Orville Prescott stated, " 'Lolita,' then is undeniably news in the world of books. Unfortunately, it is bad news ... it is dull, dull, dull, ... it is repulsive" (Appel/Newman 20). An anonymous reviewer stated that *Lolita* is "sad stuff, dull and dreary, or ridiculous" (xxvi). It is hard to imagine that anyone who has actually read *Lolita* with its elegant style, sensational content, dark humor and charm could conceivably call this book dull.

When the smoke of alarm cleared, critics began to study and appreciate *Lolita* for its refined style, intricate weavings of word games, allusions, and parodies. In his foreword to the 1997 *Lolita* screenplay, Stephen Schiff states, "*Lolita* is one of the most beautiful, poignant, funny, splendidly designed, gorgeously written, and psychologically acute works in the English language" (xi). For all the condemning reviews, *Lolita* has been called "the supreme novel of love in the twentieth century" (qtd in Parker 70). Richard Corliss states that *Lolita* speaks "eloquently to the delicious pain of romantic loss" (36). Thomas Frosch says this novel is above all else a romance and "these plot structures are infused with the demonic . . . which is a primary characteristic of romance as a literary mode" (39). Even though Nabokov regarded the novel as a "time bomb," *Lolita* is recognized by many as his best novel and a classic of modern literature (qtd in Kuzmanovich 9).

Lo, Plain Lo

> She was Lo, plain Lo in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita. (7)

While the opening paragraphs of *Lolita* are poignantly devoted to the nymphet's name and while the novel bears this name as its title, the novel itself is really about Humbert Humbert, the story's protagonist and antagonist wrapped into one chaotic package. Traumatized at age fourteen by the loss of love, he remains pitifully stuck in the

past throughout his life. The novel's foreword, written by Dr. John Ray, a.k.a. Vladimir Nabokov, begins with the novel's full title, "Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male," advising the reader early on that this is a memoir (3). As narrator, Humbert is open and invites us to "look at this tangle of thorns," for Lolita had a predecessor named Annabel Lee. He admits that had he not loved and tragically lost this forerunner, Lolita may never have been part of his life (7). Annabel was the starting point for Humbert's crimes and subsequent confession. He stops short of blaming his Annabel Lee in her princedom by the sea for being the sole cause of his madness. Humbert admits he is a "pervert" and is trying to recapture the youthful Annabel, first with prostitutes and wives and then Dolores Haze. His attempt at life with these females is fairly pathetic.

At various points throughout the first half of the novel, Humbert attempts to justify his attraction and seduction of young girls by referring readers back to the ancient Romans, Dante, Petrarch, Catullus, and Poe - all known for their involvement with young lovers. Romanticizing himself with great poets and ancient figures is his way of admitting what he is and what lies ahead for his readers. After all, these figures are admired and revered, so why can't the reader give Humbert the same courtesy? He states that he is "no poet, only a very conscientious recorder," yet he uses these figures as justification for falling in love with a child (67). If some of the world's greatest writers and poets committed the same act that he has, then he should be forgiven, as the impulse is ancient.

Humbert's rhetoric throughout the novel is self deprecating in an attempt to elicit sympathy from his audience, which he repeatedly refers to as Ladies and Gentlemen of

the Jury. He describes himself frequently with words like "madman" and "pervert." In contrast, he describes Dolores Haze as "beautiful warm colored prey." He wants the readers to know that he does not fully condone what he has done to Dolores Haze, but he does not want to be completely blamed for the fantasy and seduction. Susan Sweeney points out that Lo may be compared, through Humbert's descriptions, to the princess in Petipa's ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*. Humbert begins his story by describing his obsessions with nymphets, young girls with "imagery that specifically suggests Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty*," and he sees himself as "bewitched, under a nymphet's spell just as the prince in *The Sleeping Beauty*" (125). To him, Lolita's movements have a "ballet attitude," and he notices in great detail how she folds her arms, drops her hands, and he also observes the "'exquisite clarity of all her movements' on the tennis court" (122). Just like Aurora, Lolita has the power to enchant with the slightest tilt of her head. But the readers' view of her will be different from Humbert's as he is in love with a near perfect vision to which he is applying a dead memory, his lost Annabel who will only grow more deific with time.

Once merged with Lo on the page, Humbert enjoys acting as though he were fourteen again. In scenes at the drive-in theater, riding in the car, sitting side by side on the sofa, Humbert confides in the reader his crush, sneaking glances and touches under her mother's oblivious nose. He enjoys behaving as though he and Lo share a romantic secret, to which only he is privy. He delights in his fantasy in which he and Lo are lovers, yet at the same time he is critical of her as though he were her parent: "Although I do love

that intoxicating brown fragrance of hers, I really do think she should wash her hair once in a while" (39). Humbert spends a great deal of time trying to combine the lover and parent relationships, switching from one to the other as his needs suit him: "But now, I am just your old man, a dream dad protecting his dream daughter. I want to protect you, dear, from all the horrors that happen to little girls" (139). Humbert plays this role to gain some type of authority over a growing and rebelling Lolita after her mother's accident. He finally comes to the darkly humorous conclusion that Lolita is without morals.

In a vain attempt to ease the disgust with him and condemnation of him that the audience is surely feeling, Humbert offers an explanation or a defense for himself and sex offenders like him. He claims that all sex offenders want nothing more than for society to leave them alone as they are not fiends and "do not rape as good soldiers do" (82). They are already unhappy with themselves, they already punish themselves for their immoral urges, thus society should not take away from them that one small chance to simply touch a nymphet. He reasons that it is not as though they are murderers, there are far worse criminals than mere pedophiles who want just one small thing, which he is presenting as a triviality that society should not be concerned with, considering the crimes he *could* be committing.

Regardless of his argument, Humbert's main obstacle in the beginning is Charlotte Haze, and he does not conceal his wish that she were dead. He provides some foreshadowing that Fate will grant his wish, lest we worry that he will have to spend years with Charlotte just to be near his girl-child: "a bad accident is to happen quite soon" (74).

This brings into play the notion of Fate, irony, and coincidence. Is Fate actually on Humbert's side? When Charlotte is killed and Humbert realizes that Lolita is his alone, he declares, "I had actually seen the agent of fate. I had palpated the very flesh of fate - and its padded shoulder" (96). Before her accident, Charlotte mentions the Enchanted Hunter's Lodge. Humbert steals Lo away to the Lodge, and this is where their relationship is consummated. From this point on Dolores Haze is changed and trapped in her role as Lolita: "she was my Lolita again - in fact, more of my Lolita than ever" (104). Clearly Humbert is not thinking long term and hasn't been since he first laid eyes on Lo. He has just been racing from moment to moment without any clear, realistic goal or thought of consequences. Disaster lies ahead, and Humbert is simply barreling down a dead end street and straight into a wall as fast as he can go, determined to take Dolores Haze with him. Humbert's "Fate" has a price.

The events that take place at the Enchanted Hunter's Lodge are significant turning points for Humbert and Lo. Here, the line of fantasy is eliminated by malicious action. He drugs the child at the end of the day, while maintaining that "restraint and reverence were still my motto" (116). The following day Lo becomes Lolita as the relationship is consummated, an act that Humbert says she is accountable for: "it was she who seduced me" (124). Thus far, it has been clear to readers that Lo never realized the situation she was stepping into, but that Humbert's flirtations were all too serious on his part. Lo has been engaging in a girlish game, playing an adult in an adult situation. It is a fact that Lo triggered the consummation by suggesting to Humbert they play certain games that she

learned at camp from the only boy working there. She enjoys thinking that she has a knowledge of sex that Humbert pleads ignorance to, and she briefly wants the role of teacher. Humbert admits, "she saw the stark act merely as part of a youngster's furtive world, unknown to adults" (125). Lolita may not have been physically chaste, but she was unaware that physical relations meant something different to adults than to kids. Her view of sex is that it is "fine for complexion and fun" (129). Humbert takes full advantage of this innocence, then tries to convince the reader that nothing has been taken from her, "I was not even her first lover" (127).

Humbert eventually uses what has happened as a scare tactic to keep Lolita in line and quiet and continuing with the affair, lest she be sent to a juvenile home:

> You become a ward of the Department of Public Welfare - which I am afraid sounds a little bleak. A nice grim matron of the Miss Phalen type, but more rigid and not a drinking woman, will take away your lipstick and fancy clothes. You will go there Lolita - *my* Lolita, *this* Lolita will leave her Catullus and go there, as the wayward girl you are. This is the situation, this is the choice. (140-141)

Again Humbert refers back to the famous ancient Roman poet, hinting to his readers the Roman law of marriage that was adopted by the Church, and states that he only follows nature - "I am nature's faithful hound" - and since he has not taken Lolita's "flower" then he should not (nor should we) feel horror over what has happened (127).

Another significant turning point for Humbert at the Lodge is his meeting with Clare Quilty. The eccentric playwright Quilty is Humbert's reality, the debaucher of the fantasy; he becomes associated with the Fate to which Humbert attributes his good

fortune. Quilty, dark and sardonic, is the most captivating character in the novel. Dramatist by day, child pornographer by night, he is Humbert Humbert's doppelganger. Quilty becomes the driving force in Humbert's growing paranoia. He represents all that is wrong with Humbert and his warped fantasies. He follows Humbert and Lolita like a shadow, taking every opportunity to strike discreetly. Quilty is appropriately described by one author as a "Sade-fancying playwright," and while the character displays no physical violence on the page, the term fits due to his choice of perversions (Proffer 57). Humbert and Quilty meet on the porch of the Lodge in an intense scene. It begins a game between two pedophiles, one who makes no apologies for what he is and one who spends his waking moments trying to justify what he feels. An example is their conversation on the porch:

> Where the devil did you get her?
> I beg your pardon?
> I said: the weather is getting better.
> Seems so.
> Who's the lassie?
> My daughter.
> You lie - she's not.
> I beg your pardon?
> I said: July was hot. Where's her mother?
> Dead. (119)

This is the first time since "kidnaping" Lolita that Humbert has admitted to anyone that Charlotte is dead. It is interesting that he does so to his counterpart. Is Quilty really Humbert's Fate in palpated flesh? Humbert later states in a letter to Quilty that

Quilty "took her at the age when lads play with erector sets." This indicates that he is speaking to Fate concerning the death of Annabel. Fate has frozen his spirit at a young age, and turned him into a restless pedophile condemned by society (282). Quilty recognizes Humbert for what he is as well as the conflict inside him, and Quilty will be Lolita's liberator. Fate has dropped this desired nymphet into Humbert's lap by way of the accident he longed for, and Fate, it seems, will follow Humbert for its repayment - the loss and destruction of the fantasy Humbert demanded. Humbert finally tells Lolita that her mother has died, and in her grief she realizes what Humbert tells us at the end of the first half of the novel: "she had absolutely nowhere else to go" (133).

The bleak ending of part one of the novel does not leave much hope for the characters in part two. Lolita is now aware of the situation, and Humbert dispenses with the lover's formalities. He has created a hell for both of them, as he will acknowledge later when Lolita escapes and he is left to drive through it alone, "a paradise whose skies were the color of hell flames" (155). Humbert's goal at this point is to keep his companion "in passable humor from kiss to kiss" and away from the rest of the world (144). He wishes to "give my Lolita a really good time," which suggests that Humbert not only views this journey as a long date but also as a possible long term lifestyle for the two of them (152). He realizes that Lolita will not physically remain the girl-child he has captured, just as he has not physically remained that boy of fourteen, and he begins to ruminate over the benefits of creating a second Lolita, a third Lolita. This abolishes any sympathetic notion that Humbert is just trying to play out the youthful romance he

was denied.

The arrival at Beardsley School offers a ray of hope that Humbert cannot possibly maintain this facade living in a more stable and public situation than the lifelong road trip he'd originally envisioned. Yet, that light is quickly extinguished once the headmistress makes clear the goals of Beardsley School, which are the four D's: Dramatics, Dance, Debating, Dating. This might indeed be the perfect place for Humbert to continue corrupting his girl-child, since the administration cannot so much as remember Humbert's name, calling him Humbird, Humburg, Humberson, Hummer, and Mr. Haze. They view Humbert as just "an old-fashioned Continental father"; this opinion helps him hide his crime in plain sight (181). The headmistress's request that Humbert instruct Lolita as a father about reproduction so that her sexual maturity may develop as it should is another instance of Nabokov's carefully placed irony and dark humor. During their time at Beardsley, Humbert continues to live in fear of being discovered, but the fear seems unfounded. Humbert also discloses that during this time and his attempt to be a normal father he begins giving an allowance to Lolita for her "obligations." In short, he has turned Lolita into a private prostitute. Even worse for the reader to hear him admit, Humbert stole back the money he paid. Humbert wants the reader to approve when he outwits her, and outwits society, by being a "father" only when it suits him.

Humbert calls the scene that takes the two away from Beardsley "strident and hateful" (192). The tension, resentment, and paranoia so far have all been building to this

showdown between Humbert and Lolita. Humbert tries to regain control of the situation and relationship. Lolita lets him believe he has won, agreeing to leave Beardsley and travel with her captor once again. It is clear to the readers that something is amiss, but Humbert: "experienced a queer lightness of dreams" (195).

Humbert's murder of Quilty is premeditated; he describes himself as being "lucidly insane, crazily calm, an enchanted and very tight hunter" (277). The entire second half of the novel has been building to this intense confrontation. Quilty is the destroyer of Humbert's fantasy, yet he and Humbert are alike as Humbert admits: "His condition affected me," he says, referring back to Quilty's possibly being the Fate that Humbert so longed for earlier in the novel, and Fate always demands a price (280). A lot of Nabokov's dark humor is found in Quilty in this section of the novel in particular:

> Quilty, I said, I want you to concentrate. You are going to die in a moment. The hereafter for all we know may be an eternal state of excruciating insanity. You smoked your last cigarette yesterday. Concentrate. Try to understand what is happening to you.
> He kept taking the Drome cigarette apart munching bits of it.
> I am willing to try, he said. You are either Australian, or a German refugee. Must you talk to me? This is a Gentile's house, you know. Maybe, you'd better run along. And do stop demonstrating that gun. I've an old Stern-Luger in the music room. (279)

The killing is grotesque, even comic as both Humbert and Quilty make blunders as they fight for control of the gun. Humbert rushes to kill Quilty, while Quilty is determined to stay alive. Humbert's goal is to punish Quilty not only for taking Lolita away, but also for being the same as Humbert without apology, for indulging in his

immoral acts without shame: “Because of all you did, because of all I did not, you have to die” (283). Ironically, Quilty describes Humbert as a “beastly pervert” (280). As horrific and lengthy as the murder scene is, it is also uncomfortably funny as Humbert describes chasing Quilty throughout the house. The humor brings a certain amount of relief to the tension that Nabokov has built:

> Wiggling his fingers in the air, with a rapid heave of his rump, he flashed into the music room and the next second we were tugging and gasping on both sides of the door which had a key I had overlooked. I won again, and with another abrupt movement Clare the Impredictable sat before the piano and played several atrociously vigorous, fundamentally hysterical, plangent chords, his jowls quivering, his spread hands tensely plunging, and his nostrils emitting the soundtrack snorts which had been absent from our fight. (284)

When Humbert announces to Quilty’s arriving guests that he has killed their host, they reply with, “Good for you. Somebody ought to have done it long ago” (287). There is no grief exhibited for the popular playwright, no tears for a pedophile; the feeling is that he got what he deserved and not a moment too soon.

In the end, Humbert admits to the reader that he has written this memoir “to save my soul” (209). Despite naming the book *Lolita*, despite stating “this book is about Lolita,” despite claiming that he is seeking immortality, not just for himself but for Lolita as well, this novel was never really about Lolita (238). It is about Humbert’s possible redemption. The novel is Humbert’s confession and plea for salvation and understanding. Humbert feels he should not “parade” Lo while she is still living, asking that the manuscript not be published until she has died - to save his soul.

Cherry Pies and Incest: Kubrick vs. Lyne

In the space of a novel, an author potentially has an almost unlimited amount of space to build a story with the right amount of tension and conflict. This is not the situation for a film maker. An author has an endless source of words to plant into a reader's mind in order to construct specific scenarios, reactions, feelings, and emotions. A film maker must do this visually, everything must happen sooner, and while his resources are also substantial, there always remains the issue of time. Timing makes the transition of novel to film delicate. Which scenes to portray? What props and visual aids to use? What music? Where to film? How to keep the original story while integrating the director's vision? Both Kubrick and Lyne's films of *Lolita* are wonderfully constructed from Nabokov's tale, and each brings out different aspects of the novel. Kubrick focuses on the social satire with a rather light atmosphere, while Lyne centers on the tragedy and violence of the situation with a darker, heavier atmosphere.

The actors play an important part in transferring Nabokov's novel to film. Kubrick's cast effectively depict the smooth, sardonic side of Nabokov's novel. James Mason gives Humbert Humbert a suave and distinctive voice. His handsome looks bring out Humbert's distinguished, cultured character. Mason projects control as his character grapples morally with Peter Sellers as Clare Quilty. Sellers, best known as Inspector Clouseau in the Pink Panther films, brings out the versatileness of Quilty. He slips in and out of Quilty's multiple personae (policeman, psychiatrist, playwright) with ease, emphasizing the unpredictability of the character, as well as the dark comedic side of the

novel. Sellars plays the part with such intensity that it's no surprise to discoer that he was reported to be an obsessive perfectionist in real life.

The title role is played by Sue Lyon, who would later say that the role ruined her life. The rumor was that a member of the film crew tried to take sexual advantage of her during filming. Lyon plays Lolita as a young adult, not a prepubescent child. There are times in the film when she tries to act the part of a spoiled teenager by kicking off her shoes or giving her mother a dirty look, but it doesn't quite work. Her mannerisms are too sophisticated, too mature. She barely cries when she learns that her mother is dead. She never expresses any real scorn towards Humbert, and the arguments between them come off as tame parent/child squabbles rather than lovers' quarrels.

Shelly Winters, as Charlotte, seems more like a spoiled teenager better than Lyon. Winters depicts Charlotte as a lonely, genuinely nice, albeit annoying person. She brings out Charlotte's insecurities, speaks butchered French in an attempt to impress those around her, and you can easily see the character is a demanding woman. She sulks, pouts, whines, and it's not hard to understand why Humbert hides in the bathroom wishing an accident would befall her.

While Kubrick's actors' performances are exemplary, poised, and fluid, and bring out the comedic, sophisticated side of Nabokov's novel, Lyne's actors do better at showing the dark and tormented side. Jeremy Irons took on the role of Humbert between his roles in *Die Hard with a Vengeance* and *The Man in the Iron Mask*. Another English actor, Irons brings out the tortured, contemplative side of Humbert. He does amazingly

well at depicting Humbert's various chaotic emotions: plagued, unrealistically happy, paranoid, obsessed, and resigned heartache. As with Mason, Iron's voice transmits genteelness in Humbert. His unapologetic nemesis is played by Broadway actor Frank Langella. As Quilty, Langella is imposing and delusory. In Lyne's film, Quilty does not adopt different personae and interact with Humbert. Instead, he elects to stay on a peripheral landscape as he torments an increasingly paranoid Humbert, which makes the "game" between them crueler. Langella's diabolical Quilty is memorable, even though his performance is less showy than Sellars' version.

Lyne cast Dominique Swain out of 2,500 girls as his *Lolita*. She'd had minor roles in previous films, but this was her first major film. Swain plays Lolita as a typical teenager, listless, and defiant. A compulsive gum chewer, she wanders aimlessly. She bursts into a room rather than walking in. She shouts, dances wildly, ignores her mother, and is flirtatious and conspiratorial with both Humbert and Quilty. It is painfully clear in this film that Charlotte considers herself in competition with her daughter. Melanie Griffith is excellent at making Charlotte Haze a desperate woman who tries too hard at being sophisticated but fails. Griffith makes it obvious that Charlotte scorns her daughter by cutting cold glances at Lolita, verbally insulting her, and plotting to move the child out of the house. Griffith gives her character a shrillness rather than sulkiness. Lyne put together a praiseworthy cast for his movie, effectively transferring the novel's dark personality and brokenheartedness into the film.

At this point, I would like to examine several scenes from each film, describing

them in detail in order to capture the visual tension building from scene to scene, character to character. This may benefit those who have not seen either film. Neither film is a substitute for the novel, but rather the two present different stories of tension, conflict, dark humor, and numerous social and moral themes in Nabokov's novel.

Stanley Kubrick directed the first *Lolita* film in 1962. The characters dress conservatively, keep a straight posture, and speak with precise diction. Even with such racy subject matter there remains an air of control throughout the movie. Nabokov wrote the original screenplay for this film, but Kubrick deviated radically from the author's script. Nabokov was given the credit in the opening, but the film did not express his vision. As Michael Wood writes, "Nabokov was disappointed to see so much of his labor vanish, but he liked the ping-pong match between Quilty and Humbert" (Pifer 185). In an interview with Herbert Gold, Nabokov stated that he would publish the complete screenplay that he had intended for Kubrick's film:

> Although there are just enough borrowings from it in his version to justify my legal position as author of the script, the film is only a blurred skimpy glimpse of the marvelous picture I imagined. . . . it is not what I wrote. I shall never understand why he did not follow my directions and dreams. (205)

Kubrick's film opens just before Quilty's murder. We see Humbert enter a mansion cluttered with expensive junk and sheet-covered furniture. He is carrying a gun and shouting for Quilty to show himself, and we wonder, why is Humbert going to kill Quilty? Beginning with this opening murder scene, Quilty creates the tension for

Humbert in Kubrick's film. Not only are scenes with Quilty laden with tension, they also highlight the dark humor from Nabokov's novel, particularly when Humbert forces Quilty to read his letter aloud:

> Here goes. I see it's in verse.
>
> Because you took advantage of a sinner
> because you took advantage
> because you took
> because you took advantage of my disadvantage . . .
>
> That's good, you know. That's damned good.
>
> Because you took advantage of my inner
> essential innocence
> because you cheated me —
>
> A little repetitious, what? Where was I?
>
> Because you cheated me of my redemption
> because you took
> her at the age when lads
> play with erector sets . . .
>
> Well, sir, this is certainly a fine poem. Your best as far as I'm concerned. (Kubrick film)

Kubrick has his Clare Quilty reciting this letter while wearing a sheet in toga fashion, using an exaggerated western accent. This is our introduction to the eccentric playwright. Quilty is everywhere in this film: he dances with Charlotte; speaks rapidly to Humbert on several occasions; masquerades as various characters in order to interact with Humbert. One scene with Quilty takes place at the Enchanted Hunter's Lodge. Kubrick's

Quilty meets Humbert on the front porch, just as Nabokov wanted. Quilty is likeable here, charismatic, witty, and seemingly friendly. He poses as a police officer in town and nervously prattles on about people looking suspicious and Humbert looking so normal like himself. This is a nice twist of irony since they are both criminally and immorally one and the same:

> No, you really don't have to go at all. I like it, you know, because . . . I don't know what it is but I sort of get the impression that you want to leave but you don't like to leave because maybe you think I think you look suspicious, me being a policeman and everything. You don't have to think that because I haven't really got a suspicious mind at all. I look suspicious myself, a lot of people think I'm suspicious especially when I stand around on street corners.
>
> It's great to see a normal face, because I'm a normal guy. Be great for normal guys like us to get together and talk about world events, you know, in a normal sort of way. (film)

Quilty's purpose in this scene on the porch is to establish tension as he annoys Humbert. He states that he does not have a daughter, implicitly commenting on Humbert's daughter, and questioning Humbert and Lo's lodge accommodations. He suggests they should take the bridal suite for the "lovely, comfortable, sleepy movie star bed," which is disturbing since fathers and daughters do not belong in a bridal suite. What is most intriguing about this scene, besides Quilty's banter, is that he never faces Humbert. The audience already knows that Quilty is not speaking to Humbert by chance; he has been watching Humbert and Lolita since the pair checked into the Lodge. While the initial tension and oddity of the porch conversation escapes Humbert, it does not escape the audience. The audience has already been introduced to Quilty, has already

witnessed his fate, knows this man will be murdered by Humbert. But we do not know yet what drives Humbert to kill him.

In Kubrick's film, points of intensity and conflict always surround Quilty. He tends to appear in unlikely places, such as Humbert's dark living room. He is disguised and Humbert never recognizes him, although the audience does. Quilty appears in Humbert's home as a concerned psychologist to discuss Lolita's libido. A scene in which two pedophiles discuss a teenage girl's sexual behavior is disconcerting. Quilty suggests frankly that Lolita's home life is the problem with her libido or lack thereof, which is, as we know, fact. And the audience knows that Quilty is aware of the sexual situation between Humbert and Lolita. Quilty's purpose here is to toy with Humbert. It has become a game of pedophile vs. pedophile with a child paying the ultimate price. While Kubrick's film is tamer than the novel, Quilty remains a constant reminder of what is happening to Lolita and that the end will not be favorable to her.

Humbert's interaction with Lolita in Kubrick's film does not create much tension, if any at all. There are faint hints that their relationship is seedier than that between a father and his teenage daughter. He seems more fascinated by Lolita than infatuated and tormented as in Nabokov's novel. Kubrick's Humbert does not ponder how to violate the child without ruining her, how to have his way with her without repercussions, how to capture her without being legally guilty and socially scorned. When he marries Charlotte it's more of a father's sacrificial act for his daughter's sake rather than what it really is: buying time until he can figure out how to capture Lolita for himself. The element of

entrapment is absent.

When Humbert first glimpses Lolita, it is apparent that he finds her attractive, but he is not overwhelmed with lust as he is in the novel. In this film, Lolita has been aged from twelve to fourteen and, as a typical teenager, she regards Humbert with curiosity and almost downright suspicion. He attracts her attention simply because he is new and different, and she enjoys seeing her mother flustered over him. But the key element of tension in the novel, the development of the destructive and improper relationship between Humbert and Lolita, is lacking in this film. There is no intimacy between Humbert and Lolita here. She does not flirt with him. She does not go out of her way to make physical contact with him. Since the film was produced in 1962 it is understandable why the sexual tension of the story was doused in cold water.

However, there are a number of sexual allusions throughout the film, such as when Humbert decides to live in the Haze household based on his single glimpse of Lolita sunning herself outside. Charlotte, who is obviously enamored, asks Humbert what had been his deciding factor, perhaps her garden. Humbert charmingly replies, “Your cherry pies,” and the scene cuts to Lolita in a bathing suit. The “cherry pies” was not included in Nabokov’s original screenplay, but it does its part to suggest the budding attraction Nabokov originally intended.

Another sexual allusion occurs later in Kubrick’s film when Lolita tells Humbert, “Let’s go home. I sort of feel romantic.” Lolita says this quietly as the scene is coming to a close and can be easily missed. In Nabokov’s original screenplay, the two are standing

in the hallway of their home and Lolita asks to be carried upstairs when she mentions she is feeling romantic. The audience knows that something more than familial is happening between stepfather and stepdaughter, especially in Nabokov's screenplay. But they do not see the lovesick madness that always festers in Humbert or the turmoil that Lolita goes through in the novel. It seems that in the end Humbert and Lolita are both cheated in the recounting of their story.

A major turning point in this film is the consummation that takes place at the Enchanted Hunter's Lodge. Kubrick has his Lolita wake Humbert by shouting that the hotel is on fire. Kubrick did take some dialogue and direction from Nabokov's original screenplay for this scene. Lolita perches next to Humbert's cot, comparing her tan with his, and commenting that he needs to shave. As sexually charged as this scene should be, Kubrick had to work around a censorship code that applied to all films, put in place by the Motion Picture Production Code, which I will discuss later. Lolita discusses a "game" she played with a boy at camp by whispering in his ear, so the audience is unaware of her side of the dialogue but can assume the "game" is probably not one parents would want their teenagers to play. The audience knows by Humbert's stunned expression that she is not discussing "tiddleywinks" or "Russian roulette" (Nabokov screenplay 756). Kubrick also has Lolita stroking Humbert's hair as he tells her he's never played that game, then sliding up to Humbert on the cot and says, "all right then" with mischievous grin. The scene fades at this point, leaving open the interpretation of what happens next. It is innocent yet suspicious, and any seemingly sexual scenes in Kubrick's film take this route

to avoid offense and pacify the Production Code.

It is worth noting a scene included in Nabokov's screenplay which Kubrick cut from his film. Following the consummation, Kubrick directed the next scene to be between Humbert and Lolita in the car leaving the Lodge. Nabokov's screenplay included material to beautifully complete the sexual allusion and the turn of the relationship. Nabokov directed that cameras cut to various rooms within the hotel at the moment Humbert and Lolita change their relationship. He wished to show various guests in their morning rituals and cutting back to room 342 to hear Lolita laughing, to show Lolita sitting on the bed eating a peach, the dining room murals, the elevator in action, the maids making their rounds, and finally coming back to a particular discussion of a mural in the dining room. This scene illustrates the entire plot up to this point and, to a certain extent, foreshadows Humbert and Lolita's future:

> DR. BRADDOCK: *(pointing out details of murals to the Rose family)* This is paradise, or at least a pagan shadow of paradise. Note those ecstatic flowers and things sprouting everywhere. In this corner we have one of the enchanted hunters courting a young nymph. The coloration of the sky is dreamlike. I knew well Lewis Ruskin who painted this remarkable mural. He was a gentle soul, a melancholy drawing master who eventually became the head of a select girls' school in Briceland. He developed a romantic attachment for one of his young charges and committed suicide when she left his school. Now she is married to a missionary. (758)

The details of the mural mirror elements in Nabokov's novel: a pagan shadow of paradise to contrast with Humbert's Hell Flames; the ecstatic flowers to contrast with his lust and the consummation that takes place; the enchanted hunter versus Humbert the

enchanted professor; the young nymph versus Lolita; the dreamlike sky versus Humbert's feeling of "lightness of dreams" when he and Lolita leave Beardsley School; and, of course, the professor infatuated with a student, the adult lusting after a child (Nabokov 195). It is a shame this scene was not included in Kubrick's film. It would have added tension and heightened the sense of risk in the movie.

Although Lolita represents those "ecstatic flowers" in the mural, Humbert's ecstasy is short lived as Lolita reminds him and the audience of Charlotte's fate when she asks to call her mother. In Kubrick's film, Humbert must console Lolita with fatherly promises of buying her whatever she wishes and to never leave her. Lolita claims she would rather be with him, which leaves the viewer with hope because the audience still likes Humbert. It is easy to forget what is really going on as Humbert begins to play father and teacher and Lolita strives to make him proud when they settle down at Beardsley School. But even though this next stage in their lives seems to begin on a positive note, it will not take long for Lolita to become dissatisfied and begin pulling away from her surrogate father. Humbert will go after her when she leaves, but more as a father than a jilted lover as in Nabokov's novel. The sexual tension is absent from most of the film, and creates a problem. In the end, the audience knows something happened between Humbert and Lolita but not the seriousness of it that would drive Humbert to commit murder.

As I noted earlier, Kubrick's film and Nabokov's screenplay begin with the murder scene. Kubrick's final scene ends just after Quilty's death. The film has brought

the audience full circle with the last image being that of the portrait that Quilty died behind. By this time the audience may have forgotten about the letter that Humbert had Quilty read aloud before he was shot, a letter that stated Humbert's conflict which the audience was not to fully realize until the end. The importance of this interaction took place at the beginning of the film when the audience could not understand why Humbert was murdering a man. We can still understand that Quilty was killed for toying with Humbert and leading Lolita away, but we may not remember the letter which explains the rationale behind Humbert's action, so the final scene feels a bit unclear. While the film is good, the characters likeable, the plot intriguing, Kubrick fails to bring out the intensity and darkness of Nabokov's novel and screenplay.

Adrian Lyne's *Lolita* (1997) opens on a lush green landscape with Humbert's wayward driving as the focal point of the scene. His face is solemn and bloody as he weaves into oncoming traffic. Lyne has taken a cue from the end of Nabokov's novel where Humbert states, "I had disregarded all laws of humanity, I might as well disregard the rules of traffic" (288). There are also shots of Humbert's bloody hand clutching a bobby pin and the gun sliding on the passenger's seat. This is taking place after Quilty's murder, we do not see him until his appearance at the Enchanted Hunter's Lodge. Humbert says in a voice-over as he and Lolita arrive, "if my happiness could've talked, it would've filled that hotel with a deafening roar." His happiness is to be short lived as Lyne takes him down the dark path also found in the novel and Humbert meets Quilty on the porch.

Lyne's version of this scene is tense and dramatic. The audience never sees Quilty in a clear light, which works well in building the tension between the two characters. Quilty's face is veiled in shadow until the end of the movie, which adds to his ominousness. When Lolita meets Quilty in the lobby, the only images the audience is gets are his burning cigarette, his crossed legs, and one finger tugging on a dog's leash. Though Lolita already knows who he is, we are kept in visual obscurity with this character along with Humbert. We share Humbert's tension and panic throughout the movie until the explosive ending. When Quilty and Humbert first meet, Quilty is sitting in the dark and Humbert's back is to him. They never face one another as they talk. Quilty's speech in Lyne's movie is stylish and manipulative, rather than nervous and non-stop as it is in Kubrick's film. Lyne pulled this scene directly from Nabokov's novel and original script as Quilty begins the fated conversation with, "Where the devil did you get her?"

Quilty appears in this scene as the devil might - quietly, dressed nicely, hidden in shadows, lounging and smoking cigarettes. He is the guilt that follows Humbert, the unapologetic darkness that Humbert continuously tries to escape. The scene is mesmerizing with details like the bug zapper on the porch lighting up violently as moths are electrocuted in a blinding flash of blue. We see glimpses of Quilty in odd camera angles, under the armchair of the rocker next to him before he leans out of view, or just below the lazy turn of the ceiling fan. The camera shots shift between Humbert and Quilty at an angle to keep the viewer off-kilter. The soundtrack is ominous: the click of

Quilty's cigarette lighter echoes, flames shoot from the electric zapper hanging above as another moth is destroyed (which nicely represents Humbert's Hell Flames), and thick smoke billows from Quilty's mouth. These visual details enhance the threat that Quilty represents. Scenes with Quilty give Lyne's movie a Hitchcock feel - menacing, foreboding, surreal. He is always on the outskirts of each decision Humbert and Lolita make from this point on, just out of sight but making a huge impact. His farewell to Humbert on the porch is knowing and shameless: "That child of yours needs a lot of sleep. Sleep is a rose, the Persians say." Lyne made one adjustment to the dialogue that he took from Nabokov's novel, which adds to Quilty's brazenness. He tells Humbert: "Enjoy."

The consummation scene is played out a little differently in Lyne's film. The intent of sex is more obvious as Humbert has spent the night tossing and turning next to Lolita in bed, showing agonizing restraint from touching Lolita as she sleeps. In the morning, Lolita awakens and kisses Humbert fully on the mouth. She takes charge of the situation by untying Humbert's pajama pants, stating, "I guess I'm gonna have to show you everything." The scene fades at this point, but Lyne adds Humbert's defense to the audience, his jury, "I was not even her first lover." The audience clearly realizes what has happened.

Lyne's Lolita is not easily consoled when she finds out her mother is dead. This scene was much bleaker for her than in Kubrick's film. She cries in a separate room from Humbert, wailing as she finally crawls into bed with him. She does not cease her wailing,

she does not tell Humbert she'd rather be with him, and Humbert does not speak words of comfort and hope. He simply tells us what Lolita has already realized, "she had nowhere else to go." For all her childlike unsophisticated flirting, she now has no one else but Humbert Humbert. In his one stark statement, "Your mother is dead," she becomes an orphan and bound to a man who has her on an impossibly high pedestal while shockingly exploiting her. He has become her guardian, her world, and he will take full advantage of that.

The most powerful scene between Humbert and Lolita in Lyne's film takes place the night before the two leave Beardsley School. As stated earlier, even Humbert called this scene "strident and hateful" (Nabokov 192). The interaction between Humbert and Lolita is fairly mild in Kubrick's film as Lolita does not exhibit any true scorn towards Humbert and their quarrel never really gets off the ground. Lyne stays true to the novel as far as atmosphere and actions in his version. But the novel lacks dialogue here, so screenwriter Stephen Schiff referred to Nabokov's original screenplay to supplement his script for Lyne's film, adding lines to increase the suspense. The power of this breaking point in the relationship comes through actress Dominique Swain's talent and her connection with her character: "Lolita doesn't have a point of view. I think I can give her one" (qtd Kaye 110). This is the first time we see Humbert become openly violent with Lolita. Having been reminded that he has turned her into his personal prostitute and that she would give anything to leave him, he slaps her so hard that she falls backwards into a chair. At this point Lolita begins to scream hysterically: "Murder me! I hate you!" She

strikes the apologetic Humbert. Any sympathy that Humbert has managed to build in his audience vanishes with her reaction. He has murdered Lolita - her spirit, her youth, her decency, and her freedom. Sadly, at this point, her only hope lies in another pedophile who is more disengaged than Humbert.

The last interaction between Humbert and Quilty is extreme with a lot of dark humor, as Nabokov intended. In Lyne's film, there is no letter to Quilty. Instead, Humbert says to him, "You cheated me of my redemption. You have to die." This scene takes place between flashes of the present Humbert still driving erratically and now being followed by the police, and the past Humbert awkwardly trying to kill Quilty. We have come full circle, we know all that has happened, and the intensity of the murder has not faded by the end of the movie. Alternating past and present scenes here heightens the suspense and anticipation that something bad is going to happen, preferably to Quilty. Even though we are aware that Humbert is the same type of violator as Quilty, his self torture and his detailed confession, make him seem the lesser of two evils. We feel a certain amount of sympathy not only for Lolita but also for Humbert.

The purpose of the murder scene is to reduce Quilty from aggressor to coward for Humbert (Wyllie 157). Quilty is not only the dark thorn that pierces the unstable fantasy, he is also a "representative of America's worst failings" (158). Humbert kills Quilty in humorous, bloody fashion, as Nabokov intended when he described Quilty as "bleeding majestically," trying all the while to change Humbert's mind about killing him (Nabokov 285). As Quilty is shot repeatedly in Lyne's film, he comments, "That hurts, sir. That

hurts atrociously." After being hit in the lung, causing him to violently spew blood from his mouth, he calmly suggests to Humbert, "You should not continue in this fashion. Really." Although the scenes are horrid, they bring out Nabokov's dark comedic side and lighten the tension created in Humbert becoming a murderer. We feel slightly guilty for laughing at Quilty's murder, but Quilty's lack of remorse eases that guilt quickly. Humbert's act can be perceived as "an attack on himself," for he is not just punishing Quilty, he is punishing himself, the part of himself that feels sexual desire for little girls (Parker 77). Humbert kills Quilty for Lolita, and to gain revenge. He kills Quilty to win. His final words ending Lyne's film also end Nabokov's novel, "And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita." Thus the novel and both films become Humbert's "bid for the immortal future" (Winston 422).

How did they ever make a movie from *Lolita*?

This was the most famous question concerning Stanley Kubrick's film of *Lolita* in *The New York Times*, a newspaper that would later praise Lyne's film. The popular answer was, "They didn't" (Burns 245). The collective feeling regarding Kubrick's film was disappointment, particularly since Nabokov had written the screenplay and Kubrick had ignored it. "He had such incomparable material to work from," one critic noted, "that he could be expected to have done better" (qtd Burns 245). Other critics and magazines called the film a "victim," some simply stating, "This is not the novel *Lolita*" (245). Although resentful of Kubrick's blatant dismissal of his screenplay, Nabokov later

commented that he felt the movie to be "first rate" (246). Kubrick claimed that Nabokov's screenplay was four hundred pages long, reasoning that he had to ignore it or else the movie itself would have gone on for hours. However, the screenplay that Nabokov eventually published was only one hundred fifty-six pages, so it is unclear if this was Kubrick's true reason for slighting the screenplay. "You might wonder," Kubrick says, "whether directing was anything more or less than a continuation of the writing. I think that is precisely what directing should be" (qtd Burns 249). But if the director disregards the novelist's own screenplay, how can the film be considered a continuation of the writing?

A film should contain the elements of the director's own visions, which is what Kubrick did with his *Lolita* film as much as he could at the time with the Production Code in place. The Hays Office set the Motion Picture Production Code in place in 1934 to regulate the "morality" of Hollywood films. The Code claimed to ensure that children would not "learn 'sophisticated,' 'violent,' or antisocial behavior from watching motion pictures" (Vasey 5). The Code was designed to monitor Hollywood's representation of sex, violence, politics, religion, death, suicide, drugs, and a number of other issues. The first general principle was, "No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil, or sin" (Gardner 207). This principle made it immediately difficult to put Humbert Humbert on the screen, for Nabokov's character does pull on the audiences' sympathies at times even though his behavior is morally

abhorrent. According to the Code, sex outside of marriage was not to be shown, let alone sex with a child. Seduction, rape, and lust were also out of the question. This stifled Kubrick's film, and Humbert and Lolita's entire relationship. There could be no scenes that would incite passion that might "stimulate the baser emotions" (209). Thus, the only sexually charged scene in Kubrick's film is when Humbert paints Lolita's toenails and argues that he is the perfect housewife for her.

Presenting murder on screen was also held in tight check. It was not to be "presented in a way that will inspire imitation," and revenge was never justifiable (208). This explains Quilty's quiet death behind a painting in Kubrick's 1962 film as opposed to Lyne's brutally long and bloody scene in 1997. But no matter what Kubrick did, the film still shocked people. Some felt that the author's script gave the film a "distasteful odor" (Miller 191). Even with his own script, Kubrick had to cut numerous scenes and allusions to appease the Code. The result was a watered down version of Nabokov's novel, although the author's quirky, bizarre sense of humor still shines through in Quilty.

The film itself brought in 4.5 million dollars, so it obviously managed to have some box office appeal, and some critics considered it "an accomplished piece of American film making" (Santas 3). Some critics thought the film sacrificed too much of the novel's substance. Others were disappointed and found the movie "meandering, unequal in merit to the novel, and, more importantly, lacking the novel's erotic content" (3). The film would have never been approved or shown if the novel's erotic content had

been included. According to Frank Miller in *Censored Hollywood*, the movie clearly demonstrated that "the time had come to lift the Code's prohibition on films depicting sexual perversion" (193).In 1968, the Motion Picture Production Code was replaced with the film rating system we are familiar with today.

Adrian Lyne's film *Lolita* was received in 1997 with a cold, disgusted shoulder. The content was still repulsive to many, and just as Kubrick had to contend with the Motion Picture Production Code, Lyne had to grapple with the Child Pornography Prevention Act. This act states that any depiction, visual or insinuated, of a minor engaged in sexual conduct was illegal. "If I were doing a movie about a thirteen-year-old getting chopped up by cannibals," Lyne said, "there'd be no problem," which is not only a comical statement but sadly a true one (qtd Kaye 112). Thus, Lyne was required to go through his film frame by frame with a lawyer. Some scenes had to be cut, such as Humbert's orgasm with Lolita sitting on his lap eating an apple. Some scenes barely stayed in. Even with the editing, the movie was still met with disregard. Hollywood executives stated their reason was that the film was simply not good. Critic Derek Malcom comments on Lyne's faithfulness to the novel, saying "even if you think it fails, you can't say it's third-rate" (E8). The film was released in Europe. On August 2, 1998 Lyne's movie was broadcast for the first time in the United States by Showtime, and the Samuel Goldwyn Company released it for sale on DVD and VHS. This is said to be "one of the rare times a that a movie company and a cable network join forces" (Weinraub E6). Lyne believed that the movie was never widely released in America because Americans

would discover that "they like Humbert Humbert and they don't want to" (E8).

Reviews for Lyne's film were mixed. Richard Corliss in *Film Comment* stated that Nabokov's story was a "love story, sex story, horror story - about two people who simply do not get along" but also felt that Lyne fails at making the viewers care about Lolita and Humbert (37-38). Screenwriter Stephen Schiff quotes a favorable review for the film from a *New York Times* critic who calls the movie "an eloquent tragedy laced with wit and a serious, disturbing work of art" as well as plugging it on *Nightline* as "one of the best movies I've seen all year" (qtd Schiff xxvii). *National Review* critic James Bowman was equally enthusiastic, calling the film "excellent" (1). More importantly, Nabokov's son Dimitri said, "The new *Lolita* is a sensitively conceived, beautifully produced film. Far from being the explicit shocker some feared and others craved, it achieves a cinematic dimension of poetry . . . Lyne's *Lolita* . . . as well as Schiff's script, tend to the let the viewer fend for itself, as Nabokov's prose did for the reader" (xxiv). Some reviewers complained that the film ignores the adaptation of the novel and does not "adequately translate the language of the novel" (Watts 297). However, Dimitri Nabokov refutes this opinion, declaring Lyne's film to be "superb" if not excessive in its faithfulness to the book (Wood 184). Unfortunately, we will never know what Vladimir Nabokov might have thought of Lyne's film.

Immortality

There is no doubt that Nabokov's novel is haunting and disturbing. As Humbert

states in the end, this novel or confession is a quest for immortality. The novel *Lolita* is, as Claudia Moscovici states, "a post-Romantic novel that expresses in an exquisite, thought provoking style a passion we know to be doomed from the very start" (82). The novel is amoral, fancy, emotional, and fantastical. Nabokov challenged "the notion that art should serve a didactic purpose." Hewished to compel his readers "to ponder the ways in which fiction is created and reality called into being." Both Kubrick and Lyne's films are well done. Each highlights and intensifies different aspects of the novel. Kubrick's film turns the book into a social satire, while Lyne's focuses on the moral tragedy and passion. Lyne said, "I hope people will see a tragedy and a love story. I hope they'll laugh and cry and be very confused about why they're laughing and why they're crying" (qtd Kaye112).

While Kubrick's film is enjoyable to watch, Lyne's film brings the characters more fully to life. The conflict in Lyne's film is palpable. He gives us a better grasp and sympathetic view of Nabokov's characters. Each one is a tortured soul who wants to be remembered. Did Humbert really love Lolita? Or was he simply trying to recreate a stolen childhood love? In my opinion, Humbert loved Lolita herself, and his confession is his way of immortalizing her. The novel, and also the films, are his "bid for the immortal future" (Winston 422). Humbert's final words to his beloved nymphet in Nabokov's novel are, "And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita" (291).

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LURAY'S PEARLS: A WOMAN'S LIFE, STRUGGLE, AND WISDOM
IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1921-2008

Face Off

She stared at me. The clock ticked incessantly from its perch on top of the television. I could imagine its hands moving at a slow pace despite its frantic ticking. We stared each other down. She had always been a beautiful woman, even when she was angry. She had dark hair, smooth, pale skin, and green eyes that could cut through steel. Her posture was straight and confident, like a great oak that doesn't bend in the most forceful wind. She wore little makeup other than a light shade of sweet scented Coty face powder and Charles of the Ritz red lipstick. Her thick, dark hair was styled just-so from a pincurl setting the night before. It was never out of place. Whenever she heard her husband pull into the driveway, she would rush to her vanity mirror to check her makeup and hair. Then she would greet him at the door with a kiss that left a blush on his cheek and a sparkle in his eyes, even after 40 years of marriage. She was beautiful, she was graceful, she was amazing. And she was staring at me expectantly. The tension mounted as she pursed her lips and I said nothing.

"Well?" she asked.

"What?" I played dumb.

"When was the Great Depression?" She was beginning to lose patience. Not that

either of us was known for our patience.

I sighed, “I don’t know.” I was tired of this.

“Then you’ll look it up,” she informed me. “I also want you to look up the year it ended, what started it, and also be able to tell me something about life during the Depression.”

She left me sitting there in the living room with my history book and my mouth hanging open. I couldn’t believe she was actually going to make me do this, to make me study. Again. My grandmother had no idea what it meant to be a teenager, to be me. She had this crazy notion that I needed, and was going to get, an education. She insisted that I come over for one hour every weekend so that she could help me study. I didn’t need any help for something I wasn’t doing to begin with. I was fourteen. I had more important things to do like talk on the phone, watch the afternoon movie on TV, or maybe I just wanted to sit and stare at the wall. We got into a fight every weekend over this. I fought tooth and nail not to study, and she fought just as hard to make me learn something, anything. And forget trying to blow it off with the “I forgot my books” excuse. She put a stop to that by copying down what was in my books into a wire composition notebook or onto loose leaf paper that she would attach together at the top with a straight sewing pin. I thought she’d lost her mind. I later learned that she had done that with my mother too.

No matter what my studying came from - my own books or her makeshift texts - we always ended up facing off, breathing fire at each other like two dragons. Both of us were armed with Scotch-Irish tempers, and neither of us was reluctant to unleash them.

"They're just alike, Beth," my grandfather said one day. "Both of them. That's why they fight so much."

"I know, Daddy," my mother replied.

"And if you ever tell either of them I said that, I'll deny it," he warned. "And I mean that thing."

"I wouldn't want to be the one to tell them that," my mom stated.

"If Little Bit put half the energy into studying that she puts into *not* studying, she could do anything," he mused, referring to me, as he often did, by the nickname that he had christened me with when I was a month old. I had been born two months premature in 1974 and had stayed in an incubator for one month to gain weight before my mother was allowed to bring me home. According to her, my grandfather had stood back and stared at me in delight but declined to hold me because, as he stated, "She's just a little bit of a thing." He would wait until he was sure that I wouldn't break when he held me. From then on I was called Little Bit not only by my grandfather but also by all of my great-uncles and aunts as well.

I slouched down on the couch. I thought that maybe if I could make myself look miserable enough, the Homework Warden would just let me go. Or maybe she would forget I was there at all, and I could sneak out the back door. She ignored me and went on drying dishes. I concluded that the woman was insensitive, wicked, and out to ruin my life. I stared at my feet, wiggling my toes in various directions. After she'd dried and put away the last of the dishes, she walked back into the living room and asked if I was ready

now. I told her I most certainly was not.

"Then you just sit there," she said sternly.

"Did I look like I was moving?" I snapped.

"You're not going to, I know that," she replied, raising her voice.

We stared each other down. My grandfather, Charlie, ambled in from his workshop outside, gently whistling his own tune. He was a handsome man with striking but gentle features, and while he stood just as tall as she did, his posture was more laid back. He was always relaxed, took his time about things, and never seemed to worry. He had a dry sense of humor, which would slip by you if you weren't paying attention. Recently he had taken to saying goodbye to me with, "Well, Little Bit, I'm glad you got to see me." He said this so offhandedly that I agreed before I realized what he'd said and laughed. When he was younger, he and his younger brother and partner in crime Paul used to calmly goad each other into mischief. He once told Paul, "Bet you won't hit me in the head with that hoe." When I first heard the story, I could not figure out why he didn't have Paul hit himself in the head with the hoe instead. Of course Paul wouldn't mind hitting his brother. But for Charlie, getting Paul into trouble was worth the pain. So Paul was punished and my grandfather wore the scar on his head.

He entered the kitchen and stopped short when he saw we were at it again. He grinned and walked silently up behind his wife, whom he adored. She hadn't noticed that he'd come in. He chuckled silently, then opened his mouth in a wide, clownish grin, and widened his eyes at me. It never failed to make me laugh. Getting the hint he was behind

her, she turned and swatted him playfully.

"You stop that," she laughed. "Stop egging her on."

Comic relief swept away the building pressure. My grandmother sat beside me once more as her husband shuffled back out the door.

"Okay, that's enough fooling around for today," she said. "Let's go over this and you can go home."

Humble Beginnings

"The oldest child, Annie Laura, died from a brain tumor," Luray recalled. "They'd done surgery to remove the tumor, but it came back and there wasn't anything they could do. I don't know how Mama made it through. I can't imagine losing a child."

Luray Nelson, born February 22, 1921, was the third in a family of nine children. She originally spelled her name Louray until she was in the ninth grade and a teacher suggested she change the spelling to Luray. Life in the 1920s for the Nelson family was hard work. They were in the lower income bracket, and with four boys and five girls to feed from one small income from a hosiery mill, things were especially difficult. The family lived in Kernersville in her grandmother's house, where she was born, an old construction with four big rooms downstairs. The upstairs interior wasn't completed and stayed closed off until company came. Then the children slept upstairs while Martha and Charles entertained the guests in the warmer rooms downstairs, although they weren't much warmer. The floorboards had shrunk over time, and there were gaps in between the

panels. As the house sat on top of bricks placed at each corner, sometimes it was possible to see underneath the house. Those shrunken floorboards made for very cold mornings when it was time to crawl out of bed. When her grandmother died, the Nelson family sold the house and moved to Randleman, North Carolina.

At this time, clothes were not washed by Maytag, and even if they had been, the Nelson family couldn't afford a washing machine. For them, clothes had to be washed by hand in a tub set up on bricks so that a fire could be built underneath. One summer afternoon, Martha Nelson started the washing with the wash tub set up underneath the cherry tree, but had to tend to something else. She asked Luray and her sister Pearl to finish the clothes. The sisters, miffed at being asked to finish the laundry, starched their mother's bloomers stiff as cardboard. Martha hadn't realized her underwear had been starched so abundantly until Sunday morning when she was getting ready for church. Needless to say, they were not wearable and Martha did not make it to church that day. She also never asked the girls to wash her bloomers again.

Water had to be carried from a creek or well every day. Sometimes it had to be carried uphill. On those days the water seemed to weigh a ton. Soap for washing the clothes was also made by hand with Red Devil lye, grease, and wood ashes cooked into a gel. They used Ivory soap for bathing, "We were stingy with that soap," Luray recalled. "We also gathered wood, and we used that sparingly as well to cook and heat the house." Toothbrushes were improvised. The Nelsons would tear a small branch off a bush, and chew the end of it to make soft bristles. In place of toothpaste, they used baking soda and

salt to brush their teeth. Today we would just go to the nearest department store for anything we needed, but that wasn't an option for the Nelson family. After making sure every child's teeth were brushed, Martha Nelson would allow the children to gather around the one fireplace in the house before going to bed.

"Okay, run and get into bed," Martha said to her children. "We can't let this fire burn all night. We know what happened to the barn, don't we?" She eyed them knowingly.

My great-grandparents suspected that one of the boys had been playing with matches in the barn when it mysteriously burned down. They'd managed to save the cow, but they lost some chickens and kittens. The Nelson children would run quickly from the room to get under their covers before the chill of the house could steal the heat their bodies had absorbed. If the chickens weren't asleep, they might provide a nightly entertainment by running underneath the house.

Like a lot of families in the early 20th century, the Nelson family grew their own food. According to author Jack Kirby, "self sufficient farmers raised virtually all of their own food" during this era (45). The Nelson family had fruit trees and vegetable gardens throughout the year, so they were kept in supply of berries, cherries, potatoes, turnips, cabbage, onions, and beans when the weather cooperated enough. They even planted potatoes while it was snowing. Gardening was always hit or miss. There were also cows to be milked, hogs to be tended to, and chickens to be killed for meals when Martha would announce, "I'll cook a chicken if somebody'll kill it." Luray would cut the head off

of one small chicken, soak it in water to loosen the feathers, then cut it up for her mother to cook. Luray recalls that they even saved the neck. “You save anything that you could get a little food off of,” she said. Charles Nelson earned enough money to provide what the family couldn’t grow, like flour and sugar, but, unfortunately, he spent most of what he earned on alcohol, and his children had to work outside the home at young ages in an attempt to make up for the missing money.

“We didn’t have plentiful stuff,” Luray said. “We didn’t have money either. Still, we survived.”

School Girl

Luray started school at Piney Grove School when she was seven years old. The Piney Grove Church supported by the school. One teacher would teach five grades in one large room. Luray’s favorite subject was English. “It was easiest,” she said. “I read a lot of library books. I liked Zane Grey and Grace Livingston Hill.” During the early twentieth century, more girls attended school than boys (Thomas 295). That wasn’t the case in college, however, where boys were sent to be educated and girls went to find husbands. Educator and President of Bryn Mawr College Martha Carey Thomas wrote that “medical experts warned that too much exposure to the ‘impedimenta of libraries’ could leave young female graduates incapable of performing their normal reproductive functions” (296). You have to wonder if that meant all librarians would be childless. Thomas also disagreed with the notion that women should attend college to find husbands.

The women in Luray's 20th century stayed home to tend to families. Women were not considered productive working members of society. The society viewed them almost as servants who had to work in the home, take care of the family, and have a baby every other year. Most had little to no education, having been pulled out of school to tend to their families. Most of their education came from home life, not the classroom. Those who were well off enough might become nurses or teachers, jobs which Luray said were prize possessions and the best honor because people looked up to women with those professions, perhaps because those women had managed to detach themselves somewhat from the ideology that a woman's job was to raise the family and nothing more. While these women with careers were still expected to take care of their families, they had completed school; they had an education.

Luray wanted an education too. She didn't mind raising her family and working to feed the little ones, but she wanted to go to college and become a teacher or a librarian. A lot of girls went to college to find a husband, but not Luray Nelson. She would get an education. She would not find herself later on down the road wondering if this was all, like so many women who had gone to college for the sole purpose of catching a husband. She wouldn't listen to so-called experts - men, of course - who "applauded" women for their "femininity, their adjustment, their new maturity" because they'd given over their life and identity for someone else (Friedan 480). These experts claimed that women should "devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children" (480). Luray worked hard, extra hard in school. She had no immediate

aspirations of marriage and childbearing as she saw how hard her mother's life was. The schoolwork was hard, and she didn't have anyone to help her with homework as her siblings were younger, which meant that she had to become more self-reliant and disciplined if she was to achieve her goal. "Mama could read and write, but that was about all. She didn't have the time either. And Daddy didn't care where we were," she said.

She would later use this self discipline to learn what her children were learning and to help her daughter and granddaughter with schoolwork, much to her granddaughter's chagrin.

The Runway

Fashion for the Nelson girls was inventive. They wore handmade dresses, high top shoes, knee high stockings, and garters made from inner tubes. Charles Nelson wouldn't buy elastic as he felt it cost too much, so the girls had to make do with what they had. Her mother saved the cotton feedbags that cattle food came in, which she would then sew into undergarments for the children. While Martha Nelson sewed, the children would "help" by pushing down on the treadle behind the sewing machine so that she couldn't move it. Martha, with undisguised laughter in her voice, would shout, "Quit that! I'll whip you all until I get the right 'un!" With a lack of patterns and an abundance of guessing, the undergarments fit poorly. When Luray was enrolled in a home economics class in school, this would change.

The American Home Economics movement began in the early 1900s and was funded by Catharine Beecher and it promoted education of "household arts, domestic economy, domestic science, home economics" (Stage 5). The upper and middle classes took this as an opportunity to train immigrant girls as better servants. Home economics classes spread throughout the schools, and included sewing, cooking, and some child rearing strategies. Its aim was to "elevate and enlarge women's roles in the home and in society" (Apple 79). There was an overall goal for the women to develop "critical thinking skills" (79). Some people thought that the classes should skip any sort of "textiles" education and get right to child rearing (Grant 57). For families like the Nelsons, however, child rearing was part of everyday life. They knew more than most upper and middle class women about how to care for themselves and the babies after they were born.

When Luray began home economics classes, she expanded her favorites list to include two subjects. Luray was able to enhance her skills that she would use at home as both a cook and a seamstress. Her teacher would bring a single pattern for sewing, which everyone would use. Luray learned how to make those patterns fit to form. "I was known as one of the best dressed girls in my area," she told me with pride.

Her daughter Beth recalls, "She could sew anything. She made her clothes, my clothes, Kathy's clothes, Daddy's shirts, all the curtains, the draperies, you name it, she made it. She was the only person I ever saw who could take a top from one pattern, a skirt from another, a sleeve from another, a collar from still a fourth one, and when she got

through she had a total original. I was confused by it because she always told me to follow the rules, follow directions, and she never followed directions."

"It is beneficial for every woman to know how to sew," Luray replied to her daughter. "You need to know how to make things and make them well. You need to know how to take care of yourself."

Luray became one of the top students in her school. To honor that position, her home economics teacher asked her and several other top ninth grade students to help cook and serve at the junior and senior banquet. "It was a great honor," she told me. "Only the best were asked to serve. And we made our own aprons for the event. Mine was peach colored. We were the best qualified to take instruction and remember their manners."

Change of Plans

Poor Southern families in the 19th and 20th centuries were known to bear many children because of the lack of birth control, education, and medical care. The rural men viewed more children as a way of cultivating more land. Child labor was significant on farms and in mills at this time (Kirby 163). It was common for children of poor families to be pulled out of school in order to get jobs at young ages, which is what happened to Luray when she was sixteen.

Charles Nelson announced to her, "I got a job for you. There's so many of you, I can't feed you."

The fact that Charles hoarded his paycheck and didn't actually try to feed them all was a moot point. Luray didn't dare talk back to him, so she concealed her disappointment at having to quit school. After all, there was no need to know how to read and write in order to work the farm or perform repetitive motions in a factory job, and there also wasn't time. Students not only dropped out to go to work, but also from boredom. Although during the Great Depression school attendance fluctuated as those same children lost the jobs for which they had quit school. Amazingly, elementary school finances were only slightly hit by the Depression because they weren't expensive. But the secondary school finances were strained because the cost was greater and attendance was growing. Children during this time had nothing else to do now when they were out of the workforce because of the Depression, so a lot of them spent their days at school. Teenagers also returned to the classroom out of the desire to be part of the new workforce, one that would demand completion of secondary level schooling once the Depression was over (Tyack 144-48). People had suddenly become convinced that education mattered and was important. One interviewee in New York stated, "Anybody ought to know that the longer he stays in school the better off he will be" (173).

In Luray's region, there wasn't much reason to get a diploma as people were still in poverty once the graduation ceremony was over. They still had to work their fingers to the bone to make it through each year hand to mouth. In North Carolina, many students dropped out to work in the textile mills with their parents to contribute to their income (Davis 127). Despite the higher attendance in secondary schools, the dropout rate was

estimated to be around 75% during the hardest years of the Depression (126). Luray also had to give up any dream of college and of becoming a teacher or librarian. She went to work at the Commonwealth Hosiery Mill where she would work eight hours a day for twenty cents an hour. Her job was to label the boxes of stockings.

One night her father walked into the house and handed her three dollars.

"What's this?" she asked.

"Your check," he replied, pocketing the rest.

He had taken advantage of Luray's absence from work due to an illness on payday to pick up and cash her check for himself. She was furious but held her tongue. She couldn't disrespect her father. He surely would've made a habit of picking up her check if he could, but Luray asked her boss not to give her father her check again.

When I was a child, my grandmother used to visit her parents' home regularly to help clean since they'd become too old to do it themselves. No matter what, she had a sense of familial duty and bond. My great-grandfather used to give me hard candy each visit from a tin on top of the cold wood stove. He never paid much attention to me. My grandmother would routinely tell him not to give me candy, I didn't need it, knowing all the while that he was going to do it anyway. He would wait until she'd left the room and then tell me to help myself. Then he would turn back to the television in the corner of the room, which was always tuned in to some sporting event. Every now and then he would spit tobacco juice into an old metal coffee can he kept next to his chair. The candy offer was the most acknowledgment I ever got from him. He was not the warmest man, so it

wasn't much of a surprise when my grandmother told me that he'd been a distant father and spent most of his money on himself rather than the family. That was why he couldn't feed them all; that was why she had to drop out of school and get a job.

It was 1937 when Charles informed Luray she was not going back to school. The Great Depression was seven years in full swing. When asked how the Depression affected the Nelson family, Luray replied grimly, "We had depression all the time."

When the Depression began after the stock market crash of 1929, upper- and middle-class people especially felt the painful brunt. They'd lost their savings, stocks, bonds, their livelihoods. Men committed suicide; people became homeless; some women turned to prostitution to survive.

Luray didn't notice much difference in her life. North Carolina didn't take much of a hit until later, but the Nelsons did become aware of "mal-distribution of wealth - a leading cause of the Great Depression" (Davis 9). The price of farm goods began to fall. Major banks began to close, but the small bank in Randleman, North Carolina stayed open. Farmers also didn't have much cash and they weren't in debt as they are today. They still had their livestock and vegetables that they grew themselves.

This is where the poor had an advantage. They'd never known anything but poverty, and they'd had nothing to lose. They were used to low paying jobs, when they could find jobs. They knew how to ration what they did manage to get. This was a good thing, because the nation went from the Depression into World War II on December 7, 1941, a time when everything was rationed with coupons. The most closely guarded items

were gasoline, sugar, and coffee - anything that came from overseas. Luray didn't need the gasoline rations; she'd never had a car. And life during the nation's worst economic crisis did not phase her. As she'd said, they had depression all the time. The only difference was that the entire nation had that same depression.

When the nation finally began to get back on its feet after the war, Luray was working at the Commonwealth Hosiery Mill printing labels and making a little more money. She became good with money, saving up enough to buy her mother dentures and to take her younger siblings shopping for clothes. Her brothers and sisters never forgot this. She also took dance lessons, went skating, took trips to the beach, and even made a trip to New York to see the Rockettes. And while other women were marrying at young ages and having children, Luray had no interest in wedlock. Her father's lack of interest in the family had a major influence on her reluctance. "I'd seen what kind of mess Mama was in," she said. "I didn't want the responsibility of marriage. Besides, I hadn't met anybody I wanted to marry."

Enter . . .

. . . Charles W. Jones, known to his troops during World War II as Staff Sergeant Jones. Charlie had earned a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart in a battle in Italy. He had seen Luray around town and became quite interested in meeting her. His friend E.V. Walker happened to be dating Luray's sister, Pearl. Charlie got his introduction, but the first date almost didn't happen. He and E.V. had planned to meet up one evening to pick

up the girls together, and while a mis-communication had Charlie waiting for E.V. in one place and E.V. for Charlie in another, an almost indifferent Luray took off her party shoes and went to bed. When the apologetic men finally showed up after nine o'clock, Luray took her time putting herself back together to go out. She never dated anyone else but him after that.

A Modest Proposal

One night while they were hugging and kissing on the couch, Charlie looked at Luray and said, "Why don't we quit all this foolishness and get married?"

Well, that's original, she thought.

She wasn't surprised by the proposal, but that didn't make her any less excited. They were married in April 1949. She quit her job and settled down to be a housewife. The first morning in this new position, Charlie went off to work, and Luray sat down and cried. "I was so lonely," she said. She had spent her entire life taking care of others, working for others, and now she was alone with no one to even talk to. "This won't do," she said to herself, and got up to find something to do. She took her time making a special evening meal for her husband.

The Homestead

Interestingly enough, the person who'd graduated high school was not the person who bought the homeland. When the time came to buy land on which to build a home for

the newlyweds, it was Luray who had the money and paid the $600 for the 1.72 acres of land in cash. Charlie had never known the poverty that Luray had grown up in. Consequently, his money habits were a little looser than his wife's. He soon got into the habit of handing his paycheck over to her, keeping a small amount for himself, saying, "I know you're not going to waste it." Always mindful of the poverty she had grown up in and the chilly houses she'd lived in, Luray pinched each penny until it screamed for mercy. They were never in debt, never had to borrow money, and always had enough.

The happy couple was blessed with a daughter, Beth Jones, in April 1950. A second daughter arrived in December 1952. Kathy Jones, however, was born with severe mental retardation. The family was discouraged, but then they adapted to the situation. Luray refused the doctor's suggestion to put Kathy in an institution where she would be cared for on a constant basis and the family could forget about her. Luray had been caring for people all her life, and even though her job as a housewife and care giver became more important and challenging, she would not hand her younger child over to strangers. Despite Kathy's mental problems, she and Beth had as much of a regular sibling relationship as possible. Beth would try to teach Kathy things she'd learned in school; Kathy would scowl. The two fought like normal siblings, Beth asked her mother to give her sister away, and Kathy developed a penchant for grabbing a handful of Beth's hair as Luray carried her off in an effort to separate the two sisters. Luray and Kathy developed a bond that remained strong throughout Luray's life. Even well into her eighties Luray cared for Kathy in every way. When the family tried to help, she politely reminded them

that she was capable herself, thank you.

Luray had wanted a big family, but with the discovery of Kathy's condition, she was afraid to have any more children. There was no known cause that the doctor could pin-point as to why Kathy had turned out the way she had, no medical reason, no genetic reason, nothing that could explain what had happened. Caring for one child that would be disabled and dependent for all of her life was going to be hard enough; Luray didn't want to take the chance on possibly another like Kathy. Through the years she would occasionally tell my mother that she'd wished she'd had more children.

I gave that some thought. What if my grandparents had had more children? What if I'd had more aunts and uncles and cousins? Growing up an only child I was often lonely, always having to entertain myself. If I'd had more cousins, who lived close by and came to see their grandparents - *my* grandparents - then it wouldn't seem like something (someone) was missing. In the end, I decided it would just make the family reunions and Christmas parties that much more crowded, and I didn't want to share my grandparents anyway.

Aftermath

I was in my junior year of high school when my mother told me that my grandmother had never finished high school. My eyes lit up. Here was the perfect excuse. If she hadn't graduated, then there was no reason for me to study so hard, and she had no right to make me study. My mother saw the wheels in my head start turning furiously and

said, “Your grandmother was pulled out of school to go to work and help the family. She didn’t want to leave. She wanted to become a teacher, but she was forced to give that dream up.”

“Why would anyone *want* to go to school?” I asked. “I wish I could leave.”

“Try getting a job with no education,” she said sternly. “Try living on four dollars an hour and see how far you get, because it’s not far, I can tell you that.”

Okay, she had some sort of point.

“She had to work in a mill for twenty cents an hour to help feed a family of ten. Don’t ever say you want to be taken out of school. All the time I was growing up she was so afraid of what would happen to her and her children if something happened to your grandfather. You don’t know how lucky you are.”

Okay, so I had the opportunities that my grandmother never had. That still didn’t make me feel all warm and fuzzy towards school and studying. Times had changed. This wasn’t 1937 anymore. I would definitely be paid more than twenty cents an hour.

It took me a long time to realize that a high school diploma wasn’t going to get me far. I might as well have been making twenty cents an hour for all the good five dollars an hour did me. When I was ready, I took on college. Still, along the way I always found obstacles to veer off to, most involved socializing. I had a hard time disciplining myself, but eventually I did it. I graduated college, and even though my grandmother wasn’t able to attend the ceremony, she expressed great pride in me. I have come to appreciate what my grandmother went through, and what she was trying to do for me.

The Last Word

"Do you wish you'd gone back to school?" I asked.

"No," Luray said without hesitation. "There would've been such a gap between years, and you didn't do that anyway."

"Why did you copy all that information from Mama's and my books?"

"I did that to help you get ready for exams," she answered.

"Did you do it for you too?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "But I was determined that you were going to pass your exams. I knew the importance of an education. That was the only way you were going to get anywhere in life."

"She'd sit up late at night and copy those books," my mother said. "She wanted so much to learn."

"Well, how could I expect you to learn if I couldn't help you?" Luray said.

"I gave you a run for your money," I said. "You and I were both headstrong when I was younger."

"Oh no, you were the one who was headstrong," my grandmother told me, and I had to laugh because it was on the tip of my tongue to argue this with her. "I was trying to train you."

"How did you feel about my reluctance and flippant attitude toward school?" I asked.

"I knew it would catch up to you someday," she answered with assured wisdom.

“I pushed you because I wanted you to be able to take care of yourself one day. I was very proud the day you graduated high school, never happier. You’re old enough to understand now, to know the value of an education.”

Luray may not have finished her education in the classroom, but she headed down an educational path just the same. She knew how to make do in hard times, she knew how to manage money, she knew how to teach her daughters and granddaughter. “There is nothing more valuable than children that grow up and are able to take care of themselves,” she said.

Luray still would have liked to have finished school, but she never regretted working and raising her family, and she is reflected in all of us. When my mother became a single parent and her career as a nurse often kept her away from home, my grandmother stepped in to help raise me. She had me in the kitchen with her as soon as I was able to sit up. When I became coordinated, she had my hands in cookie dough and cake batter and biscuit dough. She did the same for me as she had done for her eldest daughter. She taught me respect; she taught me values; she taught me that I could do anything I put my mind to when it came to school and future careers. Luray came from a poverty stricken background, but she instilled values, morals, and strength into three generations - herself, her daughter, and her granddaughter. We know how to live and survive because of her. She may not have become a teacher by way of a Teachers’ Academy, but she did become a teacher. She became my best teacher and one of my biggest role models. Whenever I complained about school or assignments, she always reminded me, “Education is

something you will always benefit from. You will always use it, and no one can take it away from you."

April 2008

"Granny," I said. I was standing by her bed, the bed she's spent the last four months convalescing in.

"Granny," I said again. Her heart was still, her breath was gone, her eyes were empty.

"Granny," I repeated. I heard my mom in the living room, her voice breaking as she talked to the pastor who would be officiating at the funeral.

"Granny." We were waiting. There was an ambulance outside, three paramedics, two sheriffs' cars, two vehicles belonging to the daily care givers hired to watch over my grandmother and Kathy. Two vehicles belonged to family friends, another belonged to a fireman who'd been keeping track of my grandmother's trips to the hospital this past year through a dispatch radio, another belonged to my grandmother's pastor. My car, my mom's car were there too. Altogether there were 11 vehicles parked in the driveway and the yard but they were all the wrong ones. We were waiting for the hearse.

"Please get up," my voice was barely a whisper. They're going to take you away, I thought. I wanted to shout this at her because she didn't realize they were coming to take her away from us for good. If she would just get up . . . .

I felt her arm. She was so cold. She did not like being cold, so I pulled her covers

up to her sagging chin. I couldn't keep her mouth closed. I held onto her jaw, fully expecting her to holler at me that my hands were like ice and to turn her loose. The anticipation of that made me jumpy. Her eyes were open but I was terrified to try to slide them closed. She wasn't looking at anything. I could see how empty her body was through her eyes. It was surreal. The woman who had been my second mother, the woman who had been determined I was going to graduate high school even if it killed us both, was no longer there. She was empty.

When her beloved Charlie died in 1997, everything inside our family, inside my grandmother fell to pieces. His death was unexpected and quick, due to an abdominal aneurism. I'd never seen even one ounce of fear in my grandmother until the day of his funeral. For the next eleven years she would unsuccessfully fight major depression and dementia. In the end her mind, which had always been sharp and quick, would betray her. For eleven years she would fight to merely hold onto her sanity as her mind drifted back into the past, back to days that no longer existed, seeing people who were no longer there and not fully recognizing those who were there. My mother and I had never felt so helpless. We could take her to the hospital to treat physical ailments, the heart failure, the fractured bones, the pneumonia, but we could do nothing about her mental state except watch it decline day after day. The day finally came when she would leave us too. Eleven years and eleven days after her husband's death, she followed him.

I looked around the dim bedroom. I used to sleep in this room when I was a kid. My stuffed blue rabbit used to sit on the desk across from the bed along with her cherry

almond scented hand lotions, coco butter, and hairpins and combs. Now half empty prescription bottles littered the desk and bedside table. A walker was shoved into the corner next to the small wood and marble table Charlie had made for her bedside eleven years before; wadded up tissues and the plastic strips torn off the portable defibrillator pads lay useless on the dusty tiled floor that she used to keep immaculately clean. It'd been too late. I left the room. I walked outside and looked at all the vehicles parked around the front of the property.

I looked at all those people there to help us, trained to rescue us from illness and death, and they were all just standing around. This was a regular day for them. My world had been shattered, my life was forever changed in one instant, and everyone looked so normal. How could they look so normal?

I walked back into the house, trying not to feel bitter and angry towards those outside. I walked back into her bedroom. My mother was lying on the bed next to her mother, wailing that she wanted her mother back. What does a child do when her own mother is broken right in front of her? I'm 33 years old, but I don't want to be the adult right now. I don't want to be in charge. I don't want to be responsible. And I don't want to decide what comes next. I don't want to cry or to grieve. I don't want to think.

My mom - my mom has always been so strong so I would never suffer or lack for anything in my life. And there isn't one thing I can do to ease her pain at the moment. There are so many decisions looming our way, legal tape to sort through for the next year at the very least, but more immediately there's a funeral to put together in less than three

days. It takes you all your life to die, but only three days for everyone to put you in the ground. How the hell is that right?

The hearse has arrived. The pastor leads us outside to the back of the house. “This isn’t something that you should see,” he tells us. I want to ask, Why? Will I faint when she’s taken from the house? Will it break me? It can’t break me. Look at me, I’m not even crying. And my mother can’t stop. What is wrong with me? Maybe I should see her being taken out of the house. Maybe it will make me feel the sorrow I know is there somewhere.

My grandmother wanted my mom to be ready for this. She told her months ago with a sympathetic smile on her face, “Everyone has to lose their mama and daddy sometime.” As the pastor leads us in prayer, I ask God to give me the strength to carry my mother and my aunt through this. Kathy will never understand what has happened or where her mother went, just like she never knew where her father went, but my mom sure knows and at the moment it’s killing her. The prayer is finished and the hearse is gone. I look back at the house. My grandmother had been in that house when I walked out that doo, and now she’s gone and she’s not coming back. I flatly tell my mother, “Don’t worry. I’ll take care of everything when the funeral home calls. I’ll do it all.” She’ll never let me do it all by myself, of course, and, frankly, I don’t think she even heard me. Maybe I didn’t really say it. Maybe I just thought it. I can grieve later. Right now there’s a funeral to arrange with a hundred small details that no one ever thinks of until a funeral director points them out. There are people to notify, and there is grief to comfort - there is

so much to do and no time to do it in.

But that's okay, I realize. My grandmother raised me to be a rock in times like this, to keep my cool, to make hard decisions, to forge ahead no matter what. She insisted I learn all that I could from school and books all my life. Her true teachings, her real pearls of wisdom had rested in how to stand up against the odds, how to be strong, how to carry on in the face of disaster because that's what women do - we carry on for the sake of our families as well as ourselves. The Bible says the man is the head of the family. My grandfather always added that the "head" could not move without the "neck." He knew that even though he was the head of the family, my grandmother was the support, the strength. And that is one of the most important things she passed to my mother and me. We, as women, are the familial support. For now, that's what I will be because my mother needs my strength to lean on. I'll mourn when the funeral is done, when everyone has gone home and lives are going back to normal and back into routines. But for now I need to be the rock. Just like she was.

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